




NICK

LABOUR OF LUST

LOWE

NICK LOWE LABOUR OF LUST



**CRUEL TO BE KIND
CRACKING UP
BIG KICK, PLAIN SCRAP
AMERICAN SQUIRM
BORN FIGHTER
YOU MAKE ME
SKIN DEEP**

**SWITCHBOARD SUSAN
ENDLESS GREY RIBBON
WITHOUT LOVE
DOSE OF YOU
LOVE SO FINE
BASING STREET (Bonus Track)**

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NICK LOWE

LABOUR OF LUST



SURVIVAL KIT



NICK LOWE
LABOUR OF LUST

A Second Coming



LABOUR OF LUST: NICK LOWE TALKS TO WILL BIRCH

By mid-1978 “Dave Edmunds’ Rockpile”, or “Nick Lowe’s Rockpile” depending on who was that week’s headiest honcho, had consolidated their sound and guaranteed a top night out. For the uninitiated, imagine a sort of Beatles-with-muscles, due in no small part to the thundering, rock-solid drums of Terry Williams and the fretboard dexterities of Billy Bremner and Dave Edmunds. Abetted by bassist Nick Lowe, the group boasted three lead vocalists and a dependable song supply chain. Naysayers dubbed Rockpile “Dad’s Army” – their average age was, after

all, 32 - but no other UK combo could compete when it came to livening up a dusty dancehall in the post-punk aftermath. The story was the same in America, where the robust combo put the frighteners on a number of headlining acts who had the unenviable task of following them. “We suddenly found ourselves the ‘go-to’ opening act,” remembers Nick. “Our amphetamine-fuelled Chuck Berry music was hard to follow... the audiences lapped it up.” Exhausted from a 50-date US tour spanning the autumn of 1978 (which, for Lowe, had been immediately preceded by the production of Elvis Costello’s Armed Forces album), Rockpile returned home and commenced recording with sound engineer Roger Bechirian at Eden Studios in Chiswick, West London. Each evening the group would convene at the nearby Swan public house and, suitably refreshed, stroll up to the studio for “the graveyard shift”, a series of long, late-night sessions. Over the course of the next eight weeks, two albums would be created simultaneously: Dave Edmunds’ Repeat When Necessary and Nick Lowe’s Labour Of Lust.

Some of Lowe’s new songs, such as the waltz-time truck driver’s lament “Endless Grey Ribbon”, were given to Edmunds, but subsequently reclaimed by their writer. The rootsy nature of the material suited both performers and Lowe’s “Without Love” – later covered by Johnny Cash – may have been equally as Edmunds-friendly, but whilst Dave instinctively leaned towards classic rock’n’roll, Nick ventured in several directions at once, from the angular, almost experimental “Big Kick Plain Scrap” (Crest Motel... on drugs...) to the pure pop of “Cruel To Be Kind”. “Cruel”, which remains Lowe’s biggest solo hit, was originally recorded in 1974 during the last-gasp sessions of his former legendary group, Brinsley Schwarz. As Nick is quick to acknowledge, it echoes the harmonies and chord progressions of “The Love I Lost” by Philly soul giants Harold Melvin and the Blue Notes. It is also enhanced by some sharp Lowe wordplay - you say your love is bona fide, but that don’t coincide..., and typically nonchalant phrasing, as in: though you say you’re my friend, I’m at my wit’s end.

American record buyers loved “Cruel To Be Kind”, encouraged in part by a zany promo clip filmed around the time of Nick’s and Carlene Carter’s LA wedding. It was Columbia Records’ A&R executive Gregg Geller who insisted on “Cruel” being included on Labour Of Lust. “I seem to remember recording it with my arm twisted behind my back,” says Nick. “I thought it was way old-fashioned, but Gregg, with his usual brilliant and quiet insistence, said, ‘This is a hit.’ I remember saying to the others, ‘Sorry boys, but we’ve got to record this song.’ It looked like being a dreary exercise but once we got those harmonies going, it turned out great.” “Cracking Up” (like a worn-out shoe / ain’t wet, but the world’s leaking through...) was a fine trailer for the album when it was released as a 45 in the spring of 1979. The song’s swampy undertones and world-weary vocal reflected the turbulence and unease of the perpetual touring musician, as did “Dose Of You” (a bad infection getting worse and worse...), and “Skin Deep” (belly to belly but never eye to eye...). Nick’s quieter songs were also influenced by life on the road. He recalls, “Back

then we were sharing rooms and sometimes I'd return after a few drinks and my room-mate would be asleep. I'd still get the guitar out, but I didn't want to wake him up, so I'd find myself croaking some idea like "Basing Street" very quietly. I remember singing "You Make Me" by phoning England and singing it into my answer machine because I might forget the tune. When I got home I thought the answer machine sounded really cool and tried to emulate the effect in the studio."

Two of the songs that found their way onto Labour Of Lust had been thoroughly road-tested by Rockpile: "Love So Fine", a distant cousin of Dion's "Ruby Baby", and "Born Fighter", which features a torrid harmonica solo from Huey Lewis, then a member of Clover. The three-minute song also gave its name to a long-lost TV documentary, Born Fighters. Mainly shot at Eden Studios, the film is memorable for Lowe's running commentary on Rockpile's recording techniques and Dave Edmunds' vain attempts to persuade Nick to "calm down" during moments of alcoholic excess.

Watching Born Fighters today, one wonders how the tiny studio accommodated the fiercely competitive egos of Lowe and Edmunds and the sheer logistical challenge of making two albums concurrently for different record labels, but Nick insists: "It was never a problem dividing up the studio time. We made way for each other. I had a great deal of respect for Edmunds in the studio. I was interested to learn and able to shut up and watch him. I never learned how to operate the gear, but I was interested in the way Edmunds worked the desk. He was not over-awed by the studio, he was in charge."

"Switchboard Susan", which the casual listener could be forgiven for imagining came from the pen of Nick Lowe, was in fact written by legendary Southend rocker Mickey Jupp. The song had originally been recorded by Jupp for an album on which Rockpile provided the musical backing, but it remained an outtake. "It was a cracking backing track," says Nick, "so I offered to buy it off Mickey and he agreed. Then I stuck my vocal on it." Perhaps the telephony puns and innuendo

are a little overworked (come on sugar let's get engaged... when I'm with you girl I get an extension... you bring a smile to my dial...), but as the pile-driving beat and mean guitar riffs nail down "Switchboard Susan", you know this was a cover version waiting to happen.

Like its predecessor Jesus Of Cool (known in the USA as Pure Pop For Now People), the track listing of Labour Of Lust was slightly amended for US consumption. "Endless Grey Ribbon" was substituted with "American Squirm", a song that had been recorded with members of Elvis Costello's Attractions and previously released as a UK single. The plangent "Basing Street" – a bonus track here – was originally the b-side of "Cracking Up" in the UK and "Switchboard Susan" in the US.

Labour Of Lust was released in June 1979 in a Barney Bubbles-designed package. Rockpile undertook an extensive UK tour and then took off once again for the USA, where they opened for Blondie. Reflecting on the Labour Of Lust era, Nick says, "Arriving in America and hearing

'Cruel To Be Kind' on several Los Angeles radio stations was a trip. We were getting the action and it seemed natural, but I took so much for granted back then. We were making a lot of records and it was no big deal for someone to step up with a great song. Everywhere you turned, somebody had a cool notion going and if it didn't work, you'd move on to the next thing. We were impatient and spoilt, but it seemed like everyone had a hit record in them."

Will Birch

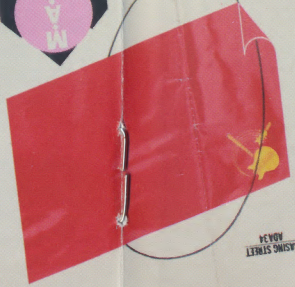
Author of No Sleep Till Canvey Island
– The Great Pub Rock Revolution
www.willbirch.com



Top: Rockpile perform Dave Edmunds' version of Girl's Talk in NYC for BBC TV, 1979. Right: Eden Studios, from left: Roger Bechirian, Faye Hart, Nick Lowe, Jake Riviera. Photos: Roberta Bayley.

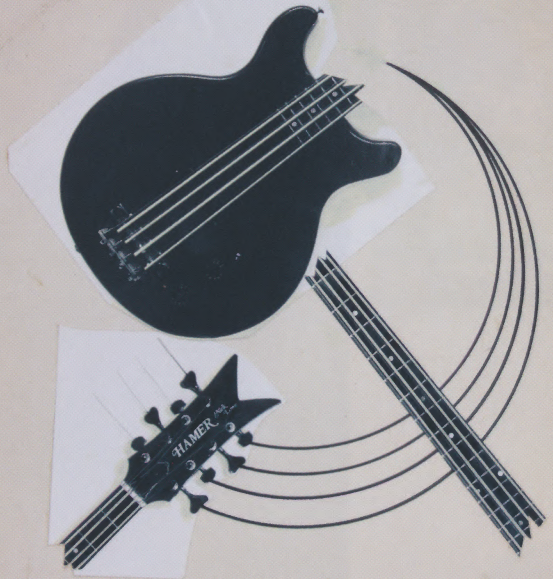


CRACKING UP
NICKA LOWE



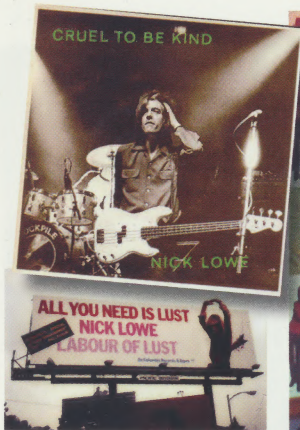
BASING STREET
RADAR 34

BASING STREET
RADAR 34

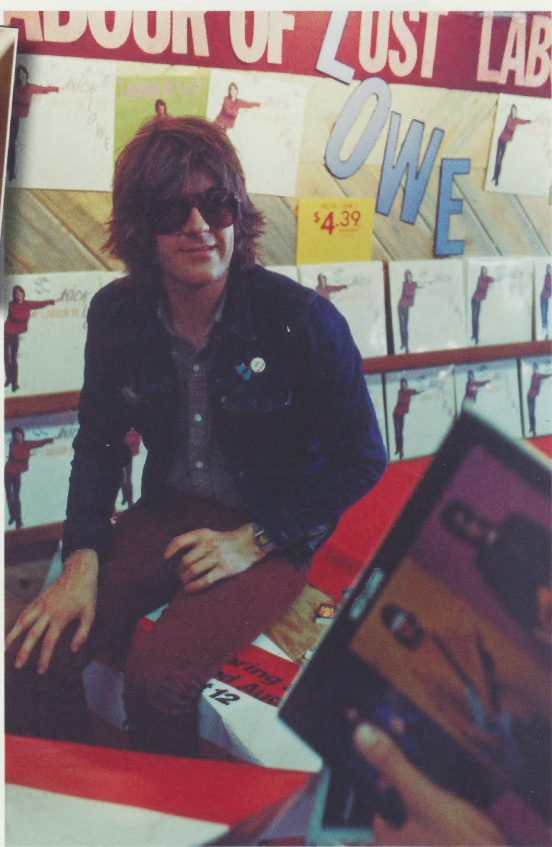


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1979
1 of 10
NICKA LOWE

Top: contact sheet from Keith Morris photoshoot. Carol Fawcett collection.
Background: Proofs for single sleeve, Cracking Up/Basing Street, Radar, 1979.
Right: "Hamer and Sickle" artwork, Barney Bubbles, 1979.



Top: Front cover, *Cruel To Be Kind*, Radar, 1979.
 Above: Billboard for *Labour Of Lust*, Sunset Strip, LA, 1979. Photo: Antoinette Sales.
 Right: On the promotional train, USA, 1979.
 Photo: Roberta Bayley.



CRUEL TO BE KIND

I had thought that Pure Pop For Now People was chock full of singles but, as it turned out, there was nary a hit amongst them. True, *Jesus Of Cool*, its UK counterpart boasted the top 10 “I Love The Sound Of Breaking Glass,” but back in 1978 the US hadn’t heard it that way. As the Columbia A&R man responsible for getting Nick Lowe into this fix I knew his next long player had better include a track that would be played on American radio.

Nick, backed by Rockpile, along with Elvis Costello, The Attractions, and Mink DeVille, was booked to tour the US in the Spring of 1978 and, as was our custom in those heady days of the early New Wave, a nifty promo item was prepared to spotlight the event—in this instance, a two-sided, clear orange vinyl 12-inch 33 1/3 r.p.m. EP, featuring Elvis and Nick on one side, with a Columbia label on it, and (in a rare display of inter-label detente) Willy DeVille’s band on the other, sporting the label of

his company, Capitol Records. The Mink DeVille song was “Soul Twist,” Elvis’ selection was “Radio, Radio,” and Nick’s contribution was a tune I was initially under the impression had the semi-Shakespearean title of “You’ve Gotta Be Cruel To Be Kind.”

I soon learned that it was a track that had been recorded by Nick’s previous band Brinsley Schwarz in its decline. I also soon found myself waking up in the morning singing it-and couldn’t escape it, couldn’t shake it, couldn’t rid myself of it as the days wore on. By such scientific means are great A&R decisions made. This must be the elusive hit we’d been looking for!

Now, back in those days Nick had an oft-expressed philosophy of record production, which he put succinctly: “bang it down and tart it up”. “You’ve Gotta Be Cruel To Be Kind” had been “banged down”. Would he consider “tarting it up”?

Then as now a gentleman, Nick readily agreed to give it a go and proceeded to cut the track anew with Rockpile. Now known simply as “Cruel To Be Kind,” it launched this very album, *Labour Of Lust*, and, in 1979, rose to #12 on the Hot 100 in the US (and #12 in the UK too). Nick’s been singing it ever since...

Gregg Geller
 November 2010



Appearing at
McFarland Auditorium
Southern Methodist Univ.,
August 5

ROCKPILE
featuring

NICK
LOWE



Labour of Lust.
On Columbia Records and Tapes.

Rockpile:

Nick Lowe vocals, bass guitar, acoustic guitar (on "Basing Street")

Dave Edmunds rhythm and solo guitars, background vocals

Billy Bremner rhythm and solo guitars, background vocals

Terry Williams drums

with:

Bob Andrews Oberheim synthesizer (on "Endless Grey Ribbon")

Elvis Costello background vocals (on "American Squirm")

Huey Lewis harmonica (on "Born Fighter")

Pete Thomas drums (on "American Squirm")

Produced by Nick Lowe

Taped by Roger Bechirian

Production coordination: Sebastian Bach

Recorded at Eden Studios, London, and Love Studios, Helsinki, Finland

Original sleeve design by Barney Bubbles

Reissue produced by Gregg Geller

Mastered by Vic Anesini, November 2, 2010, New York City

Labour Of Lust was released as Radar (UK) RAD 21 in June 1979 and peaked at #43 in Music Week that month. It was released as Columbia (US) JC36087 in June 1979 and peaked at #31 on the Billboard Album Chart the following month.



NICK LOWE: LABOUR OF LUST

- CRUEL TO BE KIND**
(3:29) (N. Lowe-I. Gomm)
Singles: Radar (UK) ADA 43 (September 1979)
Columbia (US) 3-11018 (July 1979)
Peak chart position: #12 UK, #12 US
- CRACKING UP**
(2:58) (N. Lowe)
Single: Radar (UK) ADA 34 (June 1979)
Peak chart position: #34 UK
- BIG KICK, PLAIN SCRAP**
(2:27) (N. Lowe)
- AMERICAN SQUIRM**
(2:30) (N. Lowe)
Single: Radar (UK) ADA 26 (October 1978)
Released on Columbia (US) album JC 36087 Only

- BORN FIGHTER**
(3:08) (N. Lowe)
- YOU MAKE ME**
(1:51) (N. Lowe)
- SKIN DEEP**
(3:13) (N. Lowe)
- SWITCHBOARD SUSAN**
(3:47) (M. Jupp)
Single: Columbia (US) 1-11131 (December 1979)
- ENDLESS GREY RIBBON**
(3:15) (N. Lowe)
Singles: B-Side Radar (UK) ADA 43 (September 1979)
B-Side Columbia (US) 3-11018 (July 1979)
Released on Radar (UK) album RAD 21 only

- WITHOUT LOVE**
(2:28) (N. Lowe)

- DOSE OF YOU**
(3:19) (N. Lowe)
- LOVE SO FINE**
(3:52) (N. Lowe-D. Edmunds-B. Bremner-T. Williams)

BONUS TRACK:

- BASING STREET**
(2:32) (N. Lowe)
Singles: B-Side Radar (UK) ADA 34 (June 1979)
B-Side Columbia (US) 1-11131 (December 1979)

All songs Nick Lowe/Piangent Visions Music, Inc. except Cruel To Be Kind (Lowe-Gomm/Anglo-Rock Inc. & Complete Music Ltd.) American Squirm (Lowe/Anglo-Rock, Inc.) Switchboard Susan (Jupp/Blue Beard Music) Love So Fine (Lowe-Edmunds-Williams-Bremner/Piangent Visions Music Inc. and Casablanca Media, USA)



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